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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a survey concerning the essential functions of teaching and the rights of individuals with learning disabilities to become teachers. The major issues of the study were: (1) the essential functions of a teacher; (2) whether minimum competency is being tested for candidates seeking certification to teach; (3) whether accommodations should be provided on certification tests for teachers; and (4) if so, which accommodations should be provided for teachers with learning disabilities. The 127 respondents were primarily educators in rural and small cities in Illinois. Several conclusions were suggested by the data. First, members of the education community must establish the essential functions of teaching in order to set standards for competency in teaching, and be sure that the standards are followed. Second, teacher educators and administrators are unable to deny admission to teacher education programs to individuals who may not be entirely qualified to teach but "try hard," and it is difficult for them to admit that, in spite of their best efforts, they may not be able to help an individual become a competent teacher. Third, although the Americans with Disabilities Act is aimed at giving equal opportunity to individuals with disabilities, it does not support placing an unqualified individual with a learning disability in a classroom. (Contains 19 references.) (ND)

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Running Head: Individuals with Learning Disabilities in Teaching

ED 401 240

Rights Versus Responsibilities:

Training Individuals with Learning Disabilities in the Teaching Profession

by

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Rights Versus Responsibilities: Learning Disabled in the Teaching Profession

Introduction

An increasing number of students with learning disabilities (LD) look to postsecondary education and training to achieve success in career development and job placement (Brulle, 1996), but research suggests that they have difficulty staying in and completing programs (Durlak, Rose, & Brusuck, 1994). According to Rojewski (1996), 83.7 % of adolescents with learning disabilities aspired to some type of postsecondary education. In his survey, 14.9% of adolescents without learning disabilities and 9.2% of adolescents with learning disabilities aspired to be teachers. These figures indicate more students with learning disabilities will be entering teacher preparation programs. Their rights to an equal opportunity for education and employment must be considered in light of the responsibilities of teacher educators to ensure a quality education for all students.

In a letter from the Illinois State Board of Education to the authors, dated May 17, 1996, "Individuals with learning disabilities are provided accommodations based upon their documented needs and include such things as a scribe, extra time, a test form in Braille, a signer for the deaf, a reader, among other accommodations an individual may need. In the specific concern you raised, a reader may be provided to an individual, if that is the accommodation the person needs, as documented by a licensed medical or human services professional. The job of the reader is simply to read, not to interpret what is presented. Applying, interpreting and demonstrating the knowledge is the job of the examinee."

Background on Learning Disabilities

Among the 43–45 million adults in the United States who have disabilities, it is estimated that between 5–11 million have learning disabilities (Anderson, Kazmierski, & Cronin, 1995). Approximately five percent of the students in public schools in the United states are identified as having a learning disorder. The incidence in even higher among

economically disadvantaged populations, especially children who live in the inner city. Individuals with learning disorders have a school drop out rate of one and one-half times the average (DSM-IV, 1994).

Diagnostic Criteria

According to the DSM-IV (1994), which is used by many clinicians to identify learning disorders, learning disabilities are defined as "...characterized by academic functioning that is substantially below that expected given an individual's chronological age, measured intelligence, and age-appropriate education" (p. 38). A discrepancy of more than two standard deviations between achievement and IQ is a major diagnostic criteria for learning disorder. Further, learning disorders are differentiated from normal variations in academic achievement and other scholastic difficulties due to lack of opportunity, poor teaching, or cultural factors.

Learning disorders are categorized by the DSM-IV (1994) into specific disorders of reading, mathematics, and written expression. One additional category, "learning disorder not otherwise specified" (DSM-IV, 1994, p. 53) is reserved for disorders which do not meet criteria for any specific learning disorder. "This might include problems in all three areas that together significantly interfere with academic achievement even though performance on tests measuring each individual skill (reading, mathematics, written expression) is not substantially below that expected..." (DSM-IV, 1994, p. 53). In other words, individuals with learning disabilities are of at least average intelligence but experience difficulty in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written languages (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990).

Although symptoms of difficulty in reading, writing, and mathematics may appear as early as kindergarten, diagnosis is seldom made before sufficient formal instruction has occurred, for example, the end of first or second grade for reading and written expression,

and the end of third grade for mathematics. At these early ages, a high IQ tends to enable the individual to function at or near grade level in reading and mathematics until the end of fourth or fifth grade. A number of other features may be associated with learning disorders, but do not constitute the disorder, including deficits in social skills, conduct, developmental language delays, and abnormalities in cognitive processing (visual perception, linguistic processes, attention, or memory).

Learning disorders are found frequently associated with a variety of general medical conditions such as lead poisoning, and prenatal maternal substance abuse resulting in conditions such as fetal alcohol syndrome. Eilers et al (1986) suggest that very low birth weight infants who are now being kept alive by advances in medical technology and neonatal care are at risk for future learning disabilities. The prevalence of learning disorders will likely increase among school children by the beginning of the new millennium.

History of Disability Legislation

Individuals with disabilities have a long history of seeking assurances against discrimination in education and employment. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 increased awareness that individuals with disabilities were in need of similar civil rights and protections against discrimination. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not successfully amended to protect individuals with disabilities, 29 other federal statutory prohibitions were created.

Before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, laws were enacted by Congress which prohibited discrimination against disabled individuals only within the federal government, by federal contractors, and by recipients of federal financial assistance. Such laws included the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, the Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights in 1975, the Voting Accessibility Act of 1984, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Two

other laws, the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 and the Air Carriers Access Act, applied directly to the private sector (Schneid, 1992, p. 2).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines major life activities as, but not limited to "caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, standing, lifting, sitting, reading, learning, and working." In addition to the focus on accommodations in public facilities, Title III of the ADA also requires "auxiliary aids and services" be provided, including but not limited to, interpreters, readers, amplifiers, and other devices which provide an equal opportunity for employment and promotions. Remedies awarded to individuals who have been discriminated against were designed to make the employee "whole" and to prevent future discrimination by employers (Schneid, 1992). The ADA prohibits discrimination "against qualified individuals with physical or mental disabilities in all employment settings..." (Schneid, 1992, p.7). Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination of qualified individuals with disabilities from the services, programs, or activities provided by public entities.

Present Legislative Impact on Teacher Education

Federal legislative acts (for example, The Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990; The Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and the Illinois School Code (Illinois Association of School Boards, 1992) ensure access to higher education for individuals with learning (and other) disabilities. These laws also suggest that universities or colleges modify academic requirements and provide accommodations such as oral testing alternatives, extra time for degree work, or exchanging course requirements. Discrepancies in interpretation of these laws allow litigative complaints. The resolution of these complaints helps to clarify the intent of the laws and provide direction for colleges and universities adjusting academic requirements. Several cases have already established that universities and colleges may set requirements for program completion which may exclude some individuals (cf. Pandazides v. Virginia Board of Education, 1992). In other court decisions the enforcement of

academic standards was upheld (cf. Board of Curators, University of Missouri v. Horowitz) and the use of competency testing as a certification criterion and for determining salary for educators was supported (cf. United States v. South Carolina, 434 U.S. 1026).

Method

Sample and Procedures

One hundred twenty-seven educators responded to a survey concerning the essential functions of teaching and the rights of individuals with learning disabilities to become teachers. The respondents were primarily educators in rural and small cities in Illinois. Table 1 describes the sample in terms of geographical area, teacher or administrator position, gender, ethnicity, and incidence of disability in the family.

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place table 1 here

The survey was distributed at faculty meetings by administrators and by mail to 400 educators. Surveys were returned by mail and were anonymous. Respondents who desired to comment in more detail were invited to contact us in a separate mailing for interview opportunities. Fifteen interviews have been completed: one attorney specializing in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), three special education teachers, one beginning teacher who was herself learning disabled and who held a dual certification in special education and regular education, four regular classroom teachers, five administrators, and one university professor who conducts clinical testing of individuals with learning disabilities. This paper reports data based on both the 127 surveys and the 15 audio taped interviews conducted to date.

Survey Data Collection

The survey consisted of a demographic data form and 10 questions. Response options were listed for each question and required simply a check mark. Each question also contained an option labeled "other" which provided the opportunity to add additional responses, and a "comments" options which provided a space for longer narratives. (See Appendix A.) For example, Question 9 asked, What kinds of accommodations do you believe should be provided for teachers with learning disabilities?

_____ Reader _____ Writer _____ Electronic aids _____ Other

Comments: _____

Comments written on surveys are faithfully reported as they were written. Unless otherwise noted quotations are from written responses on surveys.

Interviews Data Collection

Interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 40 minutes to two hours. A total of 15 interviews have been conducted to date, others are scheduled for fall 1996. Thirteen interviews were audio taped and later transcribed verbatim as spoken but we have added punctuation as we saw necessary to carry the meaning of the spoken text. Two interviews, not audio taped, were recorded by hand: one because it was conducted via telephone and the other because the informant declined to allow the use of the audio tape recorder. Interviews were recorded in a location chosen by the respondents, including university and public school offices and classrooms, during June and July 1996.

Data Analysis

The major questions of the study were : (1) What are the essential functions of a teacher? (2) Is minimum competency being tested for candidates seeking certification to teach? (3) Should accommodations be provided on certification tests for teachers?, and (4) What accommodations should be provided for teachers with learning disabilities?

See Table 1 for the demographic variables. Survey data, comments, and interview responses were sorted into categories. The final categories which emerged using constant comparative analysis were essential functions, competency standards, accommodations, effective classrooms, and teacher education programs. The interview data was used to corroborate interpretation, that is, tringulate, survey data to reduce uncertainty.

Findings

Responses to the major questions on the survey are reported as frequencies on Table 2. The respondents checked any number of options or none at all. The number of respondents does not always equal 100% since some questions were left unanswered.

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place table 2 here

Question 1

The responses to the first question indicated the academic content areas in which teachers should be expected to have minimum competency. As can be seen from Table 2, reading, math, and written expression were the primary areas in which respondents believed teachers must have minimum competency. Science and technological literacy were considered necessary for minimum teacher competency by about 75% of the participants. In the category "other" 18 respondents added other academic subject areas, counseling or communication, legal issues, and child development.

Of those not responding to question 1, the following reasons were cited. First, some stated they were uncomfortable assigning a specific grade level to represent competency. Others stated that they believed there are different minimum grade level competencies for teachers, depending on the grade levels or subjects taught. For example, "Obviously a secondary education major must possess a competency level higher than 12 [twelfth grade] in his/her field of study." Respondents were also concerned about the

academic functioning level of the teacher with regard to that of the pupils. One stated, "If a teacher is operating at a minimum competency how will he/she get the maximum from the children?"

Questions 2, 3, and 4

These questions dealt with minimum competency standards, that is, whether a standard exists, how the standard is presently applied, and who decides what the standard should be? Fifty-five percent of the respondents checked yes, indicating that they thought a minimum competency standard existed. Nearly one-fifth of the participants marked no, indicating that there was not an existing standard. Another one-fifth wrote, "I don't know," on the comment line.

Only 100 individuals checked a response about how the competency standard was applied. Eighty-two percent of the 100 respondents marked the option "test" and qualified this response beside the checked option saying such things as, "teacher certification test," or "Illinois test of basic skills." One-fourth of the participants checked all three of the remaining separate options— University regulations, field experience, and course work. Less than one percent of responses cited on-the-job observations and evaluations in the "other" category. Although testing was considered to be the major factor in applying the competency standard, educators' views of the test was less than complimentary. "State's Basic Skills test is a joke," said one. "It is on the verge of being insulting," wrote another.

It was believed by 65% of the respondents that the State Board of Education set standards by licensing teachers. Another 50% believed that university programs, by means of granting degrees, set minimum competency standards. Twenty-four percent thought that public school administrators participated in setting the standards for competency. Others listed as helping to decide competency standards were future employers and parents. While most participants concerned themselves with whether

minimum competency standards were determined, one individual queried, "I question the concept of minimum [competency], how low is that?"

Questions 5 and 6

Questions 5 and 6 asked for opinions about the provision of accommodations for students with learning disabilities during teacher certification tests. In deciding whether accommodations should be provided, 31% of the respondents replied yes, 43% replied no, while 17% answered yes, but.... The respondents who answered "yes, but ..." qualified their answers by adding comments such as the following: "physical disability only," "limited time only ," "depends on the disability," "accommodations for all." Examples of added comments include, "Not if their job will demand proficiency in the area (for instance reading)" and "Because these are basic skills directly related to teaching, all teachers should perform independently."

Regarding the kinds of accommodations which should be provided in state teacher certification examinations, 36% of respondents, that is 46 individuals, felt limited extra time was acceptable, 30% agreed to electronic aids and 26% agreed to a supervised private testing area. Of the remaining options, 18 persons agreed with permitting "a trained reader provided by the state" while only two individuals agreed to "an unsupervised private testing area." A number of write-ins about accommodations stated in various ways, "It depends on the disability."

Question 7

The difficulties and benefits a school might experience by hiring a teacher with learning disabilities generated the most discussion of any other question thus far. Thirty-one percent of the respondents saw financial difficulties, 63% felt quality of instruction would suffer, 40% felt achievement scores would decline, and 26% felt school climate would suffer. Other areas included difficulty with classroom management, teacher

professionalism, and liability. Those most concerned about financial difficulties were administrators. Teachers were most concerned about quality of instruction. Comments written in on this section included: "You have to be able to do something, before you can teach it." "None [no difficulties] if the teacher has learned good strategies for dealing with the LD. I don't believe lower standards should be accepted because of the learning disability."

The options we offered under benefits were "a role model for students with disabilities," which 70% of the respondents chose and "increased understanding of disabilities" which 58% chose. Of those who answered yes, 15 qualified their answers by comments that benefits would occur only without accommodations or with self-accommodations. Some described the benefits by saying, "would be enlightening," "working knowledge of effective instructional teaching methods," and "I'm not sure there are any benefits, other than the teacher with the disability has a job." In other words, only mild learning disabilities would provide benefit. As one commented, "The more severe the disability, the more the difficulties will outweigh the benefits." "If the disability is very mild," one astute responder asked, "how are the students going to know of this learning disability? I can see it as a problem if its [SIC] so evident they wouldn't have to be told. Can't particularly see any reason to tell students." Another wrote, "Teachers who have walked where students now walk often make better teachers."

Question 8

Should individuals with disabilities seeking admission to teacher preparation programs or employment as a teacher clarify the need and extent for accommodations before being admitted to the program or being hired? Respondents stated 88% of the time that the individual with the learning disability should clarify the need for accommodations when applying to teacher education programs, while less than 1% stated that they should not self-identify. Several commented, "It is illegal to ask." or "That's only being fair."

Concerning employment, 79% responded yes and 12% no to clarifying the need and extent for accommodations. Comments were varied as follows: "If they receive a degree the university has said they have completed an accredited program —the university should not issue the degree if they cannot perform/teach without assistance from others to fulfill the requirements of the program." Another reported, "Program people should understand but prospective employers may not and deny employment only on this point whether stated as reason or not."

Question 9

The only kinds of accommodations that about one-half of the respondents believed should be provided for teachers with learning disabilities were electronic aids. A writer and a reader were acceptable to about 9%. The "other" category chosen by five percent, included career guidance and special transportation. The comments enumerated acceptable items such as wheelchair access. No accommodations were acceptable to 15 respondents while 6 others felt teachers should be able to perform all duties unaided. Comments repeatedly noted included, "Reading and writing are basic teacher functions, I'm not sure that the accommodations should be made and learning disabled might be ineligible for teaching." If accommodations are made, problems may still arise, "As a teacher of students with behavior disorders, I feel they would laugh at my expectations if I (as their teacher) could not read or write."

Question 10

The last question of the survey, requiring an essay-type answer, asked for opinions on the essential functions of teachers and about the nature and extent of accommodations teachers should receive. Only 51 of the 127 respondents chose to answer this question. Three basic items were discussed in their comments. The first item concerned the idea of accommodations. Respondents believed all accommodations necessary should be provided

for anyone with a physical handicap, vision impairment, or hearing loss. Comments were generally very accepting of these disabilities, as this example indicates: "I would hate to see a person get passed over for a teaching position because of a physical disability (hearing or vision). They should be allowed an opportunity."

Most respondents felt the modifications should be the responsibility of the individual. Only minor modifications such as electronic aids were deemed acceptable by just over one-fourth of the respondents. As one commented, "I feel modifications are the responsibility of the individual, not the employers. I see no problem with Franklin Spellers or computers, however, I do have difficulty with a teacher who needs a reader."

The second item concerned the idea that a person with a learning disability probably could not do their job. For example, if the respondent was an early childhood expert, they said that the person with a learning disability could not handle the essential functions of their job. If they were special education teachers, they felt that a person with a learning disability could not handle teaching in a special education classroom. In essence, teachers in specialty areas said, "They can't do my job, but maybe they can teach at some other grade level or in some other content or specialty area." For example, a regular elementary classroom teacher stated, "In my opinion, LD students should not become regular teachers. In some cases, they could be helpful in LD programs."

The third item concerned the essential functions of a teacher. Analysis of the responses produced two main areas which captured all the essential functions listed by the respondents. First, teachers must be proficient in all academic areas, and second, they must possess, specific teaching skills. Thirty of the 51 respondents listed proficiency in the academic skills of reading, writing, and all other subject areas. Over 50% of the respondents indicated specific teaching skills. These teaching skills included organization, planning, class management, assessment and evaluation, processing skills, and extensive written reports. Communication was mentioned most often. In addition, they must know how to use different methods, techniques, and delivery of instruction. They need to

understand both learning and teaching styles. They must know how to find or make instructional materials. Teachers need to keep current by reading professional materials. In addition, they need knowledge of parenting skills and child development.

Discussion

Seeing the term disability on the survey, educators in this study replied most often in terms of physical disabilities, supporting the extant research premise that learning disabilities are hidden disabilities. Question five asked, "Do you believe accommodations should be provided for students with learning disabilities during the certification test?" The response written in was, "Only certain disabilities — visually, hearing, or orthopedically impaired." "A teacher who can't read wastes time and causes confusion. Deaf can use their eyes and should be OK. Blind I think would have to have an aide." During the interviews, however, the respondents were prompted to reply in terms of learning disabilities. The participant responded, "Whenever, I think of disabled, I think of physically disabled." During the interview with an attorney, we remarked that survey respondents tended to reply in terms of physical disability. The attorney's response was, "That's because it is easier to assess what the disability is and what might reasonably be needed to accommodate it."

Educators do not have a clear understanding of the definition for learning disabilities. While there is no consensus on a definition of learning disabilities, each of the many definitions supported by various federal and private agencies and groups (see Hammill, 1990) contains a category that is so broad it allows nearly anything that interferes with achievement to be called a learning disability. The DSM-IV (1994) demands that delays in learning resulting from low intellectual ability or cultural and educational deprivation must first be ruled out. A teacher of special education stated: "Learning disabled have an IQ of 85 to 100. They have auditory or visual problems. I don't have a definition." There seems to be a belief among educators in this study that everyone has a

slight learning disability for which they learn to compensate and that for adults this condition no longer presents a problem. An administrator answered in an interview, "Well it's a special education term. I guess my own philosophy is that everybody has disabilities and we learn how to compensate. Some of our students have disabilities and have to be shown how to compensate." Most educators, when prompted to think specifically about learning disabilities, could provide numerous examples of the problems of individuals with learning disabilities.

Minimum Competency

Participants believed strongly that there should be a minimum competency in all academic areas and that different competencies may be required for different grade levels and subjects. However they were reluctant to place a grade level on minimum competency in teaching skills, basic skills, or academic areas. While they believed that all skills are essential for all teachers no matter what grade level they teach, it was apparent that they saw different emphasis on content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. "Teachers need to be able to teach the skills [and knowledge] the students need at that [any particular] grade level." The following represents the many such comments,

> In preschool you have to be very creative to be able to break ideas into their simplest form. You have to help children understand vocabulary. To do that you must tap into their experiences and prior knowledge to help increase their learning. In high school and with older students, teachers must know the material exceptionally well. In both, you have to read really well. In preschool to keep their attention and with older students to know the information.

While participants expressed little faith in the rigor of the certification tests used in Illinois, most of the respondents did not have first-hand knowledge since the test was not

in existence when they received certification. The majority of respondents believed that "someone" must be checking for minimum competency among teacher candidates. From both survey and interview data, we discovered that representatives at each level — public school administrators, teachers, agents in the state certification office, university and junior college professors — believed that minimum competency is assured by some other level. For example, a junior college professor stated that there are students "in the junior college education program who should not be there." He went on to say that these students are helped to pass on to the next level because the university will weed out those who are not competent. If the state certification tests in Illinois are not rigorous, and accommodations, like reading or interpreting, are made for students who have learning disabilities, then individuals who may not have basic skills, for example in reading, may receive certification.

According to analysis of survey and interview data, participants identified two basic essential functions of the work of teachers. These are knowledge in all academic areas, and specific teaching skills.

Knowledge in all academic areas

Teachers need knowledge of subject matter in all academic areas. They must be knowledgeable in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing, computers, health, and English. In addition they must continue to increase their knowledge in all these areas and be willing to learn new areas such as drug awareness. As one interviewee commented, "Academic tasks, reading, writing, arithmetic, thinking.... The functions we consider part of language — reading, writing, thinking, speaking, listening — I think a person needs to be fluent and fluid in all of theses." Comments strongly endorsed strong academic knowledge as in the following example: "All persons put in front of a class should be able to lead that class academically. Styles, methods, content and all else differ, but certain standards should be adhered to."

In both the surveys and the interviews, respondents overwhelmingly supported strong academic content knowledge as an essential function of the work of teachers. Having a learning disability does not preclude obtaining a strong academic content knowledge. The severity of that disability may have a more potent affect on one's teaching than simply having a learning disability.

Specific teaching skills

communication skills. The respondents believed that a teacher's first priority must be to communicate well in order to implement and deliver instruction. "A teacher is a manager of a communication environment," said one professor at a recent conference. According to the data from the interviews and surveys, participants endorsed the belief that teachers must be able to communicate in all modes, including written, oral, and nonverbal. Written communication on documents, such as the Illinois Goal Assessment Plan, on which local and district funding depends were specifically mentioned. Teachers must observe and listen to children in order to assess and evaluate instruction and progress. They must model good listening to keep communication channels open. A novice special education teacher recognized the value of skills in multiple forms of communication saying: "Teachers need immediate executive functioning skills. By this I mean they can take charge, move quickly and know what they are doing with minimum force."

While communication is rated as very important for educators, they do not seem to communicate well about issues which are not immediate personal concerns. This lack of communication is demonstrated by the following example. Our general education teacher respondents did not know the specific provisions of laws concerning learning disabilities. The attorneys, the administrators, and some (but not all) special education teachers tended to be more current in their knowledge of specific provisions. It appears from this study that most members of the education community from primary school through postsecondary levels do not realize the extent of the accommodations that are provided at

each level. Specifically, most of the respondents did not know that the certification tests can be read to students with learning disabilities if the students qualify for this accommodation. The Illinois Division of Professional Development Standards and Assessments office stated that any accommodation given at a university would be deemed appropriate and provided on the test. When asked how an individual who could only read at third grade level could teach, a representative of the state office replied that the "person could teach lower grades." After further questioning she replied, "Well, if they can't do it they will quit in a year or two." This brings up the critical question of what happens to the children in this teacher's class for the year or two?

Educators comments on surveys and interviews were all positive in the realm of communication. An example is: "All teachers should be able to read, write, speak, listen with understanding and process thoughts in 'real' communication time, without assistance, on at least a post high school level. They must be able to model for students of any age, appropriate forms of all styles of communication and social and logical functioning." Basic skills, defined to include reading, writing, speaking and mathematics are considered to serve as the foundation for teacher development and practice. They are agreed upon necessities for teacher competence by the educators surveyed in this study and others (for example, Tannenbaum & Rosenfeld, 1994, p. 207). Yet according to the definitions of learning disabilities (cf. DSM-IV, 1994), all these skills and functions that educators believe are essential to the work of teachers are the very skills and functions with which individuals with learning disabilities experience difficulties. Each person with a learning disability will experience varying degrees of difficulty in one or more of these areas, depending on the severity of the disability.

planning and organizational skills. Summarizing the survey and interview responses, we found that educators believed that teachers not only plan for instruction but also for the social and emotional development of the children. They do in-depth

investigation to plan for materials at various levels to meet the needs of individual children and make behavior management plans for effective classrooms. Perhaps the most important skill teachers need is reflective introspection. As one respondent noted, "Teaching is an art that requires constant attention to detail and the ability to make corrections as mistakes are made."

A psychologist who identifies students for a learning disabilities assistance program on a university campus, explained that: "There are kids who can't keep things in mind and at the same time keep them separated. This is what I call some kind of an attention problem. And if they can't put them together some way, they have a processing problem." An example of this kind of application in a classroom is the everyday necessity for keeping track of more than one student's behavior at a time while also teaching a lesson and being flexible enough to change the lesson in response to students' needs. It is the need for immediate responses to students, rather than the more leisurely acts of planning, which may present difficulties for some individuals with learning disabilities.

Teachers must be able to attend to many tasks at one time: for example, to organize instructional materials; keep class schedules and students' schedules both in and out of the room in mind; evaluate student work; record, average and report grades to parents; and supply detailed reports to administrators. All of this must be done in a timely fashion. Just the paperwork can be unmanageable if it is not carefully organized, otherwise classroom management will deteriorate. As one respondent commented, "It's like trying to juggle five balls at one time." The Health Resource Center (Lowry, 1990) states that difficulties in organizational skills of adults with learning disabilities may appear in such areas as listening (for example, listening to a lecture and taking notes at the same time), sticking to simple schedules, and forgetting or losing things. Not only do educators have to create schedules, but they must follow them while being involved simultaneously in other classroom activities.

The essential functions of the work of teachers as identified by this survey correspond well to the results of the task analysis created by Tannenbaum & Rosenfeld (1994), the five core propositions specified by The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (What teachers should know and be able to do, 1994) and the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (Most critical knowledge and skills of a future educator, 1995) list of critical knowledge and skills. The five core propositions state that teachers must have the ability "to be committed to students and their learning, know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students, manage and monitor student learning, think systematically about their teaching and learn from experience, and to be members of the learning communities."

Accommodations

Consistently in both surveys and interviews, when a question dealt with accommodation, many of the responses were qualified by limiting accommodations to those with physical handicaps. A few respondents felt accommodations would not be acceptable on basic skills for an individual with learning disabilities, but if an individual qualified as disabled, accommodations should be allowed on the specific content tests such as elementary education. They did not want to appear as prejudiced against disabled individuals, "I'm not a bigot, but...." ; however, they wanted "only qualified individuals as teachers." The consensus seemed to be stated best by the following comments, "Classrooms today demand accountability from all teachers. If teachers cannot take a test without assistance, they surely cannot help others taking those same kinds of tests." While accommodations should not be made on basic skills tests, they may be available in areas not related to teaching performance: "Provide accommodations for those disabilities that have no relation to teacher performance and impact on children." The attorney we interviewed suggested that this is the manner in which the ADA was intended to be interpreted.

Our respondents deemed electronic aids, spell checkers, computers, and tape recorders as reasonable accommodations for teachers. Other options expressed during interviews included, "Another person to read things being sent out, to check grammar, spelling and accuracy." or "writing guides, lines on the board for visual problems." However, everyone did not agree about the use of accommodations: "...if you couldn't produce anything written without doing it on the computer, and spell checking it, I question that. I think you should be able to perform literacy skills at a ...reasonable level." In order for an accommodation to be reasonable, besides financial considerations, several respondents made comments such as this example:

> Reasonable would be not infringing on anyone else's ability or opportunity to be successful in that environment. So if you had someone coming in to fill a position and in some way by filling that position it was a detriment to students or to students learning or to other teachers in the school then I don't think it would be reasonable to place the person in that position.

Legal counsel advised, "If you have to hire somebody else to do the essential functions then the person with the disability is not qualified to do the job. And no you do not have to hire somebody else to do the essential functions."

In essence participants believed that individuals with learning disabilities could perform the work of teachers as long as they were qualified, but believed that most individuals with LD would have a difficult time meeting the qualification requirements. As one respondent noted, " As any other teacher or professional, one ought to be able to do the task he/she is assigned to complete."

The greatest diversity of opinion was about accommodations ranging from no accommodations to anything that was needed. The majority stated that qualified individuals would make accommodations on their own and questioned the "fairness" to other teachers if some had more help in meeting the job requirements. The following comments expressed the views of many.

> I believe that physical disabilities should be accommodated in anyway possible. But I feel that accommodating and assisting learning disabilities may jeopardize the integrity of teachers as professionals. Teachers receive some of their respect out of their knowledge and ability just as many other professionals do. I think that too much assistance may result in loss of respect, integrity, authority, trust from parents, students, and community and professionalism.

Another reported, "Accommodations as students are okay, but once hired, a teacher should be able to teach, independently and as well as any other teacher in the district — no exceptions."

In interviews, university professors stated that they believed that term papers are written for some learning disabled students by others. In interviews, teacher education students stated that they believed answers on tests are provided by those individuals who are readers for the students with LD. During interviews, teachers admitted to having student teachers who could not write, read, or do more that one thing at a time, yet they pass student teaching, in some cases with all A's (Gilbert, Waggoner, & McIntyre, 1996). There are also student teachers, as well as practicing teachers with learning disabilities, who can and do teach competently. The Americans with Disabiities Act (1990) requires that the person with the disability be qualified to be entitled to ADA protection. As the attorney explained,

> You [teacher educators] are put in an interesting predicament. Because you want to be fair, but one, you don't have to hire individuals just because they have disabilities, and two, we ought not to hold them to different standards. We still have to maintain the same academic standards. They still have to meet the same course requirements as everybody else. You don't want to put somebody out in the field [as a practicing teacher] if you are sitting them up to fail. Its great to talk about improvement, and I personally think that is a part of it but is everybody else being graded on improvement?

Where does the responsibility lie for assuring that teachers are qualified?

The American dream

More than one-half of the people who responded to the survey expressed the belief that teachers, in particular, want everyone to succeed. The focus of teachers' work is building self-esteem and educating children so that they may become "anything they choose to be," in other words, may actualize their full potential. Trying to be positive, and not appear "bigoted," biased, or prejudiced, respondents answered yes to many questions which they immediately qualified by writing in such remarks as: "...but they can't do my job", or "I believe there are some employment areas where a learning disability can be compensated for. I do not believe teaching is one of them. If the disability interferes with the teacher's function (without assistance) then the person should not be teaching." The objective of licensure or certification tests is to distinguish between those who do and those who do not possess important knowledge and skills at the time of entry into their profession (Tannenbaum & Rosenfeld, 1994). However, possessing such knowledge does not necessarily imply that and individual will perform successfully on the job. A college professor we interviewed claimed:

> You can't just say, yes, a person with a disability can be a teacher, or no they can't. It's just too dependent on the individual. What they want to teach. What their disability interferes with. What I would say more is these are the performance criteria for people who want to teach. If you cannot perform all of these functions, if you cannot do them above and beyond, at a very high level, then you cannot teach. We have to let go of that whole 'I want everybody to succeed.' And realize not everybody gets to be exactly what they want to be. We do owe it to everyone to help them find something that they can do to feel fulfilled. It doesn't mean we have to sacrifice the quality of education or the children because this person had a right to become a teacher if they want to.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The responses in this survey point to several imperatives for educators. First, members of the education community must establish what the essential functions of the work of teachers are, set the standards for competency in teaching, and be sure that the standards are followed. In light of the demand for excellence in education, it will not be enough for individuals to simply meet the "otherwise qualified" and "essential functions" criteria. Society demands levels of competency above the minimum from its teachers. Making decisions about competency is the responsibility of everyone in the education community, whether they are teacher educators in universities, elementary, or secondary settings, or administrators.

Second, it appears that the community of educators, indeed the society, is so entrenched in the humanistic ethos, or egalitarianism, that teacher educators and administrators are unable to deny admission to teacher education programs or the teaching profession to individuals who may not be entirely qualified to teach but who "try hard" or are "nice" or have pleasant personalities. Further, since teachers choose teaching as a career partly because they wish to help others and are trained to do so, it is difficult for teachers to admit that in spite of their best efforts, they may not be able to help an individual to become a competent teacher.

Third, although the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) is aimed at giving equal opportunity or equal footing to individuals with disabilities, it does not support placing an unqualified individual with a learning disability (with or without accommodations) in a classroom. Despite the commitment of universities and special programs to support the individuals with learning disabilities through various accommodations, very frequently the accommodations are not closely monitored to ensure that the student is capable of handling a classroom independently with reasonable accommodations. The education community

must also determine what are reasonable accommodations for a complex job such as teaching.

The following is a list of recommendations:

1. Develop screening for admission to the teacher education program which might include oral interviews and other activities which represent teaching tasks to determine strength of conviction about teaching and level of communication skills of each candidate.
2. Require proficiency tests in each academic subject area to be passed at the college level before course grades are assigned.
3. Create student-teaching performance standards which dwell more on specific teaching skills and less on personality variables and extend the practicum period beyond one semester.
4. Ensure that conditions of certification testing do not invalidate the test results by allowing accommodations which perform the essential functions of teaching for the testee.

A formidable job faces teacher educators; to create a kind of task analysis of the work of teachers and then decide which of those tasks are so essential that the work, teaching, cannot be done without them. In other words, it is our task to describe clearly the essential functions of the work of teachers. Once we have agreed on these functions, we can fairly and equitably comply with the legal mandates of the ADA while assuring a quality education for tomorrow's children.

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Table 1
Demographics Data

Number of Responses to each Variable on Survey

Variable		Number of Responses	Total
Area			127
Rural Southern Illinois		28	
Small City Southern Illinois		56	
Rural Northern Illinois		14	
Small City Northern Illinois		24	
Out of State		5	
Position			127
Administrative:			24
Superintendents		2	
College Professor		14	
Principals		7	
School Psychologist		1	
Teaching			102
Elementary		73	
Secondary		23	
Teacher Aide		2	
Counselor		4	
No Response		1	1
Gender			127
Male		36	
Female		90	
No Response		1	
Ethnicity			127
White		116	
Hispanic		1	
African American		6	
Native American		1	
Multiracial		1	
No Response		2	
Disability in Family			20
Relationship	Other than LD	LD	
Self	1		
Mother	2		
Father	1		
Brother	2	2	
Sister	2	1	
Uncle	1		
Husband	1		
Wife	1		
Daughter	2		
Son	1	1	
Niece		1	
Brother-in-law		1	

Table 2

Response Frequencies for Survey Questions

Question 1. In what areas should we expect a minimum competency level for teachers? Check all that apply. Please indicate what the minimum competency would be using a grade level.

Area	Range (Grade level)	Average	Frequency
Reading	6-16	12.84	104
Math	6-16	12.23	104
Written Expression	6-16	12.84	103
Science	6-16	12.07	98
Technological literacy	6-16	12.17	93
Other	8-16	12.88	18
counseling, legal issues, communication, child development, other subject areas			

Question 2. Does a minimum competency standard exist?

Yes	70
No	28
No Response	29

Question 3. If this standard exists, how is it applied?

Tests	62
University Regulations	46
Field Experience	33
Course Work	38
Other	8
Job experience, communication, observation, state certification, Teacher education programs	
No Response	51

Question 4. Who decides what this standard competency should be?

Practicing teachers	23
Curriculum/Personnel directors	24
Administrators	30
State Board	82
University Programs	63
Other	7
Future employers, parents	

Question 5. Presently all teacher candidates in Illinois must take the Illinois State Teacher Certification test. Do you believe accommodations should be provided for students with learning disabilities during this certification test?

Yes	39
No	55
Yes, but	22

Question 6. Please explain what accommodations should be provided in the State teacher Certification Exams.

Unlimited Time	14
Limited Time	46
Supervised Private Testing Area	33
Unsupervised Private Testing Area	2
Reader- trained, provided by state	18
Reader- provided by student	3
Reader-prerecorded	14
Writer	16
Electronic aids	38

Other	(electronic portfolio)	3

Question 7. A) What difficulties if any do you believe your school district might experience as the result of hiring a teacher with a learning disability?

Financial	39
Quality of Instruction	80
Achievement Scores	51
School Climate	33
Other	15
classroom management, teacher professionalism, liability	

B) What benefits if any do you believe your school district might experience as the result of hiring a teacher with a learning disability?

Role model for students with disabilities	89
Increased understanding of people with disabilities	74
Other	6

Question 8. Should individuals with disabilities seeking admission to teacher preparation programs or employment as teachers clarify the need and extent for accommodations before being admitted to the program or hired?

Program Admission		
	Yes	112
	No	10
Employment		
	Yes	100
	No	15

Question 9. What kinds of accommodations do you believe should be provided for teachers with learning disabilities?

Reader	10
Writer	12
Electronic aids	57
Other	7
career guidance, special transportation	

Question 10. Please use the remaining space (or attach additional pages) for any comments you wish to make about any aspect of education and employment which may effect the lives of prospective teachers with learning disabilities. Specifically, we are interested in your opinions and beliefs about (a) the nature and extent of accommodations and services prospective teachers should receive and (b) what you believe are the essential functions of a teacher, that is what are those functions which should be performed without assistance. Total of 51 respondents to this question.

Modifications		
	Any needed	0
	Limited or Minor	14
	None	0
Essential Functions		
	Basic Academic skills	30
	Specific teacher skills	26